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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DISCUSSES COCAINE
BUST, OTHER ISSUES

REF: A. FREETOWN 380

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 336

Classified By: CDA Glenn Fedzer for reasons 1.4(b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador, DCM, Poloff, and Deskoff met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA) and key members of her staff on July 31. The Minister promised to provide assistance in guaranteeing regular consular visits for the detained AmCit connected to the recent cocaine bust, as well as gave assurances that President Koroma intends to see those involved punished, regardless of their political connections or wealth. The Minister also discussed other issues, including the Government's delegation to UNGA and her intention to effect appropriate oversight of official passports and visa requests. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM and others, met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Zainab Bangura on July 31. While the purpose of the meeting was to introduce DCM Fedzer to MFA interlocutors, it also provided a forum to discuss pending issues. Per reftel A, Minister Bangura provided information on the Government of Sierra Leone's (GoSL) UNGA delegation, and will provide updated information in the next two weeks. The Minister also briefly spoke of consular issues, saying that note verbales were overused in the past for requesting visas, and will be used from now on only for official travel. Further, Minister Bangura stated that she has a list of the diplomatic and service passports issued since 2002, and will begin the process of withdrawing those that should no longer be considered active.

[1](#)3. (C) Minister Bangura mentioned an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss launching the President's agriculture program. She said that they need harvesters in the immediate future, to bring in the current rice crop and allow for planting the first of next year's expected two to three crops. The long-term plan includes a focus on cash crops and value-added production, in the hopes of becoming a net exporter in three years' time.

[1](#)4. (C) Delving briefly into the topic of the July 13 cocaine bust (see reftel B), Ambassador reminded the Minister about a letter regarding the AmCit charged in connection with the case. She informed Minister Bangura that USG standard operating procedures involve a monthly meeting between consular officers and detained American citizens, and asked for assistance in ensuring that these visits occur. The Minister responded that she will draft a letter to the Attorney-General, informing him that procedures need to be developed to allow regular and easy access to the prisoner.

[1](#)5. (C) The Minister thanked the Ambassador for USG assistance provided to date concerning the cocaine bust. She said that government officials are aware of the severity and importance of the case, and that President Koroma has personally

promised that whoever is found to be involved will be punished, "even if it's his own mother."

¶6. (C) Comment: While the Minister primarily reiterated details covered in previous discussions, Ambassador and Emboffs welcomed the promise for monthly visits with the AmCit, as well as the continued rhetoric regarding tough justice for those guilty of narcotics trafficking. Minister Bangura's intention to withdraw official passports from those no longer in service to the GoSL is also welcome, demonstrating once again her commitment to addressing problem issues within her ministry. End Comment.
FEDZER